



Blanche Hearst Girtman (1922-2019) 1978  
Oral History Interview

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Boynton Beach City Library Local History Archives

## Biographical note:

Blanche Hearst Girtman (1922-2019) was an educator with Palm Beach County schools for more than 43 years, where she was a teacher, a dean, and an assistant principal. Always active in her community, Girtman was instrumental in establishing a child-care center, a health clinic, and has served on many committees, including the Human Rights Committee for Palm Beach County and the Community Relations Board for Palm Beach.

## Interview summary:

Interviewed by James Hartley Nichols on 12 December 1978 for the Boynton Beach Oral History Project. Topics discussed include Blanche Girtman's observations of segregation and integration in Delray Beach and Boynton, including the unequal pay of teachers, the first Black student to attend Seacrest High School, now known as Atlantic Community High School (Yvonne Lee), the Black schools closing between December and March for Black students to work in the fields, the lack of adequate facilities and supplies at Black schools, and the conflicts between Black and White students. Girtman also details her own educational and personal history, including her experiences during the 1947 hurricane, cooking, and canning.

## Keywords:

- Boynton Beach (Fla.)—History
- Educators – Florida – Palm Beach County – Interviews
- African Americans – Florida – Palm Beach County – Interviews
- Hurricane, 1947 – Personal narrative
- Boynton Beach (Fla.) – Race relations
- Southern States -- Race relations
- Interracial dating – Florida – Palm Beach County
- Segregation in education – Florida – Palm Beach County
- Boynton Colored Elementary (Boynton Beach, Fla.)
- Oral histories

#### Technical note:

No audio available. Transcription created in 1978. Transcription includes two notes of omitted statements, and other transcriptions done during this time period have had edited content. Finding aid created October 2019 by Georgen Charnes.

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#### Interview transcript:

JN: This is James Nichols and I am here with Mrs. Blanche Girtman at 912 N.W. 3rd st. in Boynton Beach, Florida.

BG: I'm Blanch Hurst Girtman and I grew up in in the city of Delray Beach, Florida. I was brought to Delray Beach when I was a baby. My father and mother moved to Delray Beach back in the twenties and I am a product of Florida. I was born in Daytona Beach, Florida. My mother told me that I was born on Spruce Street in Daytona. My father, along with my other sisters and brothers, came down to Boynton. There were eight children in our family. I am the sixth child. From an early age I have always attended church. There was very little else to do except to go to church and go to school. We didn't have too much recreation that was planned. We had to make our own recreation.

JN: Lets go back to your early days in Daytona Beach.

BG: I don't know anything about Daytona, only that I was born there. I was brought from Daytona Beach to Delray Beach as a baby.

JN: When did your parents come to Daytona?

BG: My parents were originally from Alachua county, from around Jonesville and Gainesville, so, they were Floridians from birth.

JN: could you tell me when you were born?

BG: Let's make that a big secret. I am still working on the census and I have tried to get my birth certificate but I think I'll have to send to the census for it because I have investigated earlier in Florida and they don't have a record of it.

JN: What year did you come to Delray Beach?

BG: I don't know but I'll say that we came to Delray Beach in the middle twenties. I was a baby when they came so, I don't know anything about that.

JN: What are your first recollections of Delray?

BG: My first recollections of Delray are of sand roads. I remember Atlantic Avenue and Northwest second street and Northwest Fifth Avenue making an H. Atlantic Avenue ran from the canal, from the ocean to highway 441. That was paved all the way, but the farther you would go west the narrower the road would get. They paved Delray in the Black community from Atlantic Avenue to Northwest Second Street. Northwest Second Street was paved from downtown to the Seaboard rail line. That was the length and breadth of paved roads until times changed in the late forties and early fifties and they began paving more roads in the whole area. I finished elementary school in Delray. I finished elementary when it wasn't known as Junior High. They didn't have any Junior Highs then. We moved from the old Delray building from N.W. Fifth Avenue, where the old elementary school was. Then they built a new elementary out where the Spady elementary school is. S.D. Spady is out on what N.W. 8th is now and that school is entirely elementary. But way back then, in the early to middle thirties, and the early forties that school was the moving ground for the whole school plant. That was because they tore that two story building down on N.W. 5th Avenue and made the whole of Delray, Carver Training school out on N.W. 8th. The school encompassed grades one through twelve and there was no high school as such -- no separation of the grades.

JN: Did you go through all twelve grades in one school?

BG: I went through all twelve grades right at Carver. It was later named Carver. The early name of it was Delray Training School in Delray Beach.

JN: And the present Carver School is the new school?

BG: That Carver School was built around 1957, 58, 59.

JN: About that time Seacrest was built?

BG: Seacrest was built before Carver was built because Seacrest was built around 1953 to 54.

JN: What year did you graduate from elementary school?

BG: I never graduated from anything but high school. Now, you are just trying to get to my age.  
(laughter)

JN: No, No.

BG: I graduated from high school in 1940 and I went from high school to Florida A&M College. My dad said he would give me two years of college so, I went and took the elementary school course for two years. Then I came out and started teaching. My first job was here in Boynton.

JN: How did you get up to A&M?

BG: On the train, the Florida East Coast. It was two racks you know.

JN: You changed trains in Waldo?

BG: No, we changed in Jacksonville. We took a spur on the Seaboard. We had to get off the East Coast at the terminal. That was a wonderful experience because that was the biggest place I had seen in my life.

JN: Jacksonville?

BG: Jacksonville. I had been to Miami in my earlier days because my grandmother was in Miami my father's mother. So, he had carried us to Miami. Incidentally my father had a Model A Ford -- I guess that's what it was called. My father was Clarence Hearst. Everybody in Delray called him C.B. Hearst. My mother was Claire B. Hearst. My dad had carried us all to Miami and we had been into West Palm Beach because we did have transportation when I was a girl.

JN: What did your father do?

BG: My father took care of lawns. They call it landscape gardening. In his earlier days in Delray he worked for Mr. Hoss on the polo field. Mr. Hoss. I don't know what his real name was but my father called him Mr. Hoss. He worked for the Igleharts and the Phipps on the polo fields over in Gulfstream. They owned the polo field and Mr. Hoss was the foreman. He worked over there for years. I imagine he learned to care for lawns and things like that through that work and later he went into business for himself and he began to take care of different peoples lawns. That is how he made enough money, I imagine, to send me to college.

JN: How many students were at A&M in those days?

BG: I imagine there were under a thousand. If we had 800 we were good.

JN: I guess you met people from all over the state.

BG: Oh, yes. I once boasted that I could sleep in every major city in the state because of the contacts that you make when you go away to school. You meet young people from all over and they get to know you and you get to know them. Usually, it is one of the nicest ways to build up friendships. And they are lasting through the years.

JN: Were you a member of any organizations there?

BG: I am a Sigma Gamma Rho woman. I am a Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority. I sang in the choir and I was a member of the play guild. I was in plays. I had two years of college. I later came back and started teaching school. If I remember correctly, I think it was Mr. Leonard, Mr. John I. Leonard who gave me my first job -- and Mr. Youngfield. They put me right here in Boynton and then I started going back to college.

JN: When did you get your first teaching job?

BG: Let's see. 1942, in June. That was an era in Palm Beach County when the school year was divided. The Black students in those early years didn't go to school nine months. They would start school March 1, and they would go to school until December and then they had to get out to gather the crops.

JN: I didn't know that.

BG: That is true. And that is when I started working in Boynton at what we called the split session. The kids did not have an opportunity to go to school in the height -- when those beans and peppers had to be picked. And they had to pick beans, and that helped here in Palm Beach County.

JN: All the kids in all the grades?

BG: All the Black kids didn't go to school. They stopped just before Christmas. In October-November they stopped and they stayed out of school those three months; January, February, March. March 1, they would go back to school. That's when I started working in June because they were overcrowded and I got a job. Well, I started working with my first two years college degree and my first paycheck; I made 70 dollars a month. That's all I made. And when the government took out of that and the teachers retirement took out of that I brought home 63 dollars. If I hadn't lived with my father, and incidentally, I moved up here and I started living with Mrs. Arleen Miller. At first I started trying to catch the bus every morning in Delray.

JN: Greyhound?

BG: Greyhound bus. I lived in Delray and I would get up every morning and I would be down at the bus station by six, and I rode my bicycle. Mr. McNaughton found out I was coming down there and he would let me leave my bicycle at the bus station all day. Sometimes the bus driver would see me coming around the corner on second and he would hold the bus up and wait for me. He would wait for this little school teacher to come around the corner and put her bicycle behind the bus station so I could ride it home in the afternoon. And that's how I got my first job.

JN: I see. Where was the bus station in Delray?

BG: The bus station was in the Federal on the northbound Federal, where the northbound Federal is now. It was about 200, 250 feet down from where Robert C. Roy is now -- in Delray Beach.

JN: And how did you get from the station in downtown Boynton Beach?

BG: I had to walk from downtown Boynton out here every morning. When the bus man found out what I was doing, and how far it was to walk, and how dark it would be, he started putting me out at the intersection of Tenth avenue and North Federal.

JN: What was the name of the school you taught at in those days?

BG: Boynton Elementary. There were four class rooms in that building. It was an old school. There were four classrooms in there and we had an outdoor bathroom.

JN: For all twelve grades?

BG: Eight grades. Boynton Beach Elementary didn't go any farther than eight grades.

JN How many grades were in each room and what grade did you teach?

BG: I taught fifth and six. Each teacher had two grades. There were four teachers at one time. Then we improved; got more children that we needed so two teachers were in one classroom. And then as the first-second, and third-fourth grades grew in size a teacher would take a combination grade and one teacher would have all the first and one teacher would have all the second and the overflow would make a first and second. So, that would be three classrooms there and the teacher would be working with two different groups of children in that classroom. Then it grew, and kept growing and as it grew they would add a teacher. There was a third and fourth grade teacher sharing the same room. But it was nothing for the fifth and sixth grade teacher to have both grades. I always had that heavy group because I am a tall person and a strong voiced person. So I taught fifth and sixth grades for so long in Boynton. I was so young I had to demand respect from the young people because I wasn't too much older than they were. And having come out of two years of college I was rather young when I started work.

JN: About twenty years old?

BG: Nineteen. I was nineteen when I started teaching. Some of the students there were fifteen-sixteen. I wasn't too much older than them and they knew it because they would go from Delray to Boynton, having grown up in Delray. In order to demand respect and get the respect of the students I had to develop a veneer of being a very positive teacher. That is the way I expressed as a teacher for a long while. I made them do the work and I was kind of strict, and that was it. The reason I had to get the air about me was because I was so young when I started.

JN: Did they pay the White teachers and the Black teachers the same amount of money?

BG: Well, no. No they didn't. That didn't come about until the passage of the equal rights act. Then they began to have to do it by law.

JN: When was that?

BG: Around 1965-66. You could see an equalization, I'm not sure but Palm Beach was strictly a Southern area. There were the usual. You go to the back door for Blacks. Nothing like this was done actually until when -- I don't like to look at that kind of life but it was here -- you couldn't go in the front of Dr. Weems office, you had to go to the back door. He had two doors and the older Dr. Weems delivered both of my older children. Everything was Black and White. There was a White section for the bus station, there was a side you stand on. It was separated and there was no such thing as separate but equal. There was no such thing. There never was. My classroom and the ones I went into in Boynton, we had to make the letters to make a bulletin board. I learned to write well because I learned to draw.

JN: I noticed that you had excellent hand writing.

BG: I learned to write because I had to teach penmanship. So, that's why I had to learn to write well. When I was in college which was A&M U, which Florida A&M College is now named, I was taught how to construct the letters and we had to draw them on a scale. To this day I can do that. Consequently, we were taught how to write.

JN: Did you use them in your classroom as an instructional aid?

BG: Any instructional aids, we had to make. And later on, as the county grew we got somethings but never enough. We had to go buy pegboard. The only thing we didn't have to buy was crayons and erasers.

JN: Out of your pocket?

BG: Anything we had to use like all the different kinds of workbooks, skills that we taught, we had to do that. We got books but we got used books a lot of times. It was late in the 1960s that we began to get new books.

JN: You used the books that were cast off?

BG: We used the books that were used before they got to us. They were used all around and then they got down to the Black schools. But all through those hardships we managed to keep our children and through those years and over those hardships some of them will survive.

JN: Yes, that's right.

BG: Someone is going to provide and someone is going to survive and someone is going to make it.

JN: Was there no indoor plumbing at this school?

BG: There was no indoor plumbing when I started work. There was an outdoor bathroom with plumbing. But the first one wasn't. The first outdoor toilet was not a plumbing job.

JN: When did they replace that?

BG: They replaced that in the late forties. They put up a flush toilet. One for the boys and one for the girls. There was no teachers -- the teachers went outside in the rain to that same toilet. All girls and all boys used that same toilet. There was a girls' side and a boys' side.

JN: And the kids went home for lunch?

BG: Yes, you could go home. There was no lunch room. Those parents who brought their kids in off the rangeline to school, they brought their little brown bags. Those children that lived in this area, all of them had an hour for lunch so they could go on home to lunch and rush on back to school. It wasn't until 1953-54 that we had a school lunch program. In fact, this school was built and there was no lunchroom then. That was added in the late fifties. That lunchroom cafeteria and the new building, that two story building, that's the Poinciana plant now that was added in the late fifties and early sixties.

JN: You said you went back to school. Where did you start back to school?

BG: I started at Florida A&M. By the time I started back to school in 1945 I started back to school to get my other two years to complete my four years of college. I started in the summers. I would work at the Patio Delray in the winter after school. I missed something there, Mr. Nichols. Between the session of 43 January and February of 1943, if I remember right, I went to Belle Glade in 1943 and 1944, I believe it was.

JN: And you lived in Belle Glade?

BG: I would go out there every Monday morning and come back to my Delray area Friday evening. But I taught school out there for two terms.

JN: Did you live with a family?



BG: No, Mr. Taylor the mortician there had an apartment and all of the teachers out there stayed in that rental apartment.

JN: You all commuted?

BG: Most of them commuted. My father helped me to buy a little car I think it was around 1944 or 1945 and I bought this little car and that helped me to get around and teach. I would come back over here. After 1944 and 1945, if I remember right, I worked at the Patio Delray when I wanted to start going back to school. The double sessions had stopped and school began to go year round. So', then I worked at night at the Patio Delray. I made extra money like that as a bus girl and I made extra money to go back to summer school, which was in 1945. That's how I really learned to serve parties and things like that, by working there.

JN: How many summers did you have to go to school?

BG: I really could have finished in 1947 but I lacked one course. That was a course in physical education. I needed one credit and one half credit in administration. They wouldn't let me get out in 1947. I wanted to graduate in 1947 because I was married at that time, and I was pregnant with my oldest child. I still went back to summer school. I wanted to get out very much but I crowded my schedule and I went through two years of college in two ten week summer school terms, five weeks in each session. You could take a semi-load in each session and that helped us to get out of college. So, I would stay from June to August and that was ten weeks. Consequently I was able to get it on my schedule and I was able to get everything on except that one course in physical education. I had to go back and take that in 1948. I married in 1946, November of 1946, Denver C. Girtman Senior. My husband's father was Willie C. Girtman and they had come to Boynton years ago and they were old settlers here in Boynton. So, my husband's family was an old family line here in Boynton. The Willie C. Girtman family, and Julia Girtman was his wife. So, I married Denver Girtman and he came from a large family, too. After I married my husband I wanted to continue to go to school. I went on to school pregnant and came out and kept working that winter. 1947 and 1948 I did not work. I was pregnant, so, I did not work. That's how I lost two years of my working years because I stopped two years to have my children. One child was born in the summer so I didn't get out that year. I had one child that was born in August. I didn't have to stop work that year.

JN: What year did you start back to work?

BG: I started back to work that year at Lake Osborne -- 1948. When I came back into the school system, Mr. Leonard was superintendent. He put me at Lake Osborne and I stayed up there from 1948 'till 1953. I had my second child in 1953. Then I wanted to come back home to work. Having a young baby like that I wanted to be home. I came back to Boynton teaching in 1953 and I taught in Boynton. Then I had only one grade. I taught the sixth grade from then until I went on to college.

PORTION OMITTED FOR THE SAKE OF BREVITY

I was promoted to Dean at Carver Junior-Senior high school in 1966. I moved to Carver and I have been at the high school level ever since, as a Dean. Under Title 9 you don't say Dean of Girls you just say Dean. You don't even say Dean of Boys even though people say it. You can't have any differentiation of the sexes.

JN: How many Deans are there now?

BG: I work at Atlantic High School now and there are three Deans.

JN: I remember Mr. Clark.

BG: Well Mr. Clark came to Carver as assistant principal when the teachers went out on strike in 1969 he came to Carver as an assistant principal and I worked for him for a year or two. But he isn't in the school system any more. I worked with Norman Price. Now he is an assistant principal at Atlantic. You remember him?

JN: He taught me World History.

BG: Earl Hawk is the principal at Atlantic High School now. Roy Magdeline is an assistant principal. Miss Cannon is still at Atlantic High School.

JN: What is the name of the other Dean there?

BG: Roy Bane. He is a Dean. He was a Dean at Carver too. When the Schools merged in 1969 and 1970, that was the last year Bane and I worked over at Carver. Mr. Pompey was made a principal. He was assistant principal over there at Seacrest.

PORTION OMITTED FOR THE SAKE OF BREVITY

JN: Do you care to relate any of your early memories about integration? I remember the first Black kids at Seacrest in 1962- 1963. I graduated in June of 1963 and my senior year four or five girls integrated the school.

BG: Yvonne Lee was the first girl. She is now teaching. She teaches in Palm Beach County. She was the first girl, Black girl, to integrate Seacrest. First Black student period. She is a mother, she is married, and she is now Mrs. Odom in Delray. She is doing very well. I had been working with White teachers at Carver. At that level it didn't amaze me. The biggest problem with people is whether they can accept change. If you can't accept change you grow stale inside. And if you stay small inside your whole being, your thinking -- I don't see how a person can really say they love their fellow man when you don't look at a situation just like it is. I've never had much trouble with it but I have had so many people who have. Some teachers have stopped, both Black and White, because they just can't cut it. But it doesn't make any difference to me because I just never felt it.

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BG: I have always felt that children do what they hear in their homes. The home is the breeding ground for all of it. I have always felt if I have provided the right background in my home I might not get a lot of things out of my children. My daughter has always been inhibited so to speak. She has moved freely with White or Black and she speaks pretty good English. Her speaking habits are like what I imagine mine would be. I just don't have those inhibitions because I have always moved in those circles and it never amazed me. But I have all kinds of problems coming across my desk as a Dean.

JN: Is that right? These days?

BG: In the early days it would be integration.

JN: Oh, more then?

BG: We hardly have them now. Very seldom. We have them but they are not as they once were. I think that the hardest thing that they didn't want to accept was that a Black man would one day date or go with a White girl. When they overcame that one point -- they never said anything about a White man having a Black girl but they just had to overcome the fact that a Black man would have a White girl. I think that was the basis of the entire problem. Consequently, the Black boy on all counts caught a hard way to go. They had to prove to the White girl that it didn't make any difference. They had to prove that. They had a hard road to hoe. Now you could see a White boy talking to a Black girl and there was never anything said. But if a White girl wanted to talk to a Black boy and that boy talked to that White girl there was always a question. So, they went underground with it. They taught it in the home. Stay on your side. Let them stay on their side. And that is just about the way it is now.

JN: It hasn't been overcome?

BG: I don't think that you will overcome that. The only way that you will overcome it is if the children will do it themselves. Now I have seen with my own eyes White girls taking up with a Black boy. Nothing said about it.

JN: In the last few years?

BG: In the last two or three years. Nothing said about it on this campus, but the girl does the most of the talking, the forward movement. No one says a word. If the Black boy is doing the forward movement toward a girl, you have a problem.

JN: I see.

BG: As long as that White girl is moving towards him no one says a word. I think they have learned in integration just like they have learned when there wasn't integration, they learn how to handle the situation and they are doing what they want to do no matter what. This younger generation is so different than students were ten years ago that they are doing just what they want to do. Now, the parents may not want them to do it and the parents are in some cases losing because I see parents every day who come to my office who want their children to go to school and these kids are doing what they want to do. In fact some parents haven't had a tight enough rein on them when they were two or three years old. You teach that child more in the first five years of his life and if you don't have that foundation that child is not going to be what you want him to be when he is thirteen, fourteen, or fifteen.

JN: When did integration really get underway between Carver and Seacrest?

BG: 1969 and 1970, the year that they merged.

JN: Was that by Federal mandate?

BG: It went all over. I think Palm Beach County went into it pretty good. Palm Beach County has always been highly, what? racial? So Palm Beach County was, even from the old days. You can't get that out of their blood stream. Each city is like that. Boynton itself is very much like that. Boynton is one of the last cities in the county to get down off some of those racial bugaboos. I think that when you realize that

education changes man you can't hold man down just because he is Black. Education changes people. With this education you are going to see more changes and if you can't accept it, it means you are small inside. These young people are going to do things that in the next ten to twenty years I may not be living to see, but they are going to be around and they are going to do it. Boynton will be even more different. We had a very well controlled campus during the integration. We had all kinds of problems. I still say some of those problems came from home. Children had been taught the words that they could pass on. One thing I would like to point out is that Blacks talk louder. They come back with bad words. And you say they come back with knives, ice picks and things. But I have seen just as much subtlety among the Whites. They are softer spoken but they will pass by them in the halls and call them all kinds of derogatory names. A Black can call a Black that name and he won't say a word but you let a couple of Whites and that's a fight. And a White kid would pass them and say all these things and the first thing you know -- the Black kid would hit. Because that's his fighting piece, especially coming from a White kid. And this would make him mad. The White kid wouldn't do anything out loud to let you know who did it but if you came up to him and said, did you say that? I can't help how much you feel inside, when it comes to handling young people you have to be fair and they can read you just as loud and clear. And if you are handling them and you are not fair, whether you are handling, White -- Black, Black and White mixed or whatever, they are going to call it. The best way to handle that situation is to get straight down the middle of the road. What you do to one you do to the other too. And if you do it like that you will come out of it best. I don't associate with everybody, because I am Black. Because I am Black don't tell me my face looks like Jones' face over there. It's the same way it took you to tell me by my features, and how I look, I'm Blanche Girtman. I can look at you and see you are Nichols. I used to look at a whole sea of White faces and I couldn't tell them apart. But we had to learn each other just like we are trying to learn each other. I have different ways and you have different ways. I think Atlantic High School has been one of the best schools in the county for mixing -- integration problems.

JN: How many students are there at Atlantic High School now?

BG: About 1080. They have grades nine through twelve. When you were at Atlantic High School they had grades ten, eleven, and twelve. Since then they have made ninth grade part of the high school. And they made what was once the junior high now the middle school sixth, seventh, and eighth grades.

JN: Tell me about your store on Tenth Avenue in Boynton.

BG: When I married my husband he was working in the grocery business.

JN: That was in 1947?

BG: 1946, when I married him. In fact, I never would have married him had it not been for Mrs. Mott Partin. Her name was Lois Partin. Mrs. Lois Partin and Mr. Mott Partin owned the grocery business on Tenth Avenue and Seacrest. Seacrest Avenue was once named Green Street and Tenth Avenue was Wells Road. The Partins had a little grocery house, a little wood frame building. In the inset of that corner was a little wood frame building, but it was a bar. Next to that was the Partin's grocery store. My husband, Denver Girtman Senior, worked for Mrs. Partin. He ran that grocery store during WW II. I met him in the store because I had low blood. I was sort of anemic and I used to eat ice cream all the time. I also needed meat. That's how I met my husband. He had been married but he was divorced and he started trying to date me. Mrs. Partin knew it so she started to try to get me to date him. So that's how I met him. Finally I went out with him and he asked me to marry him and I married him. After we married,

I had my first child in 1948. He was still working for Mrs. Partin. In 1951, if I remember right, he stopped working at the little store and went into business, a little business, for himself. We had moved a frame building off Tenth Avenue onto a lot and he built a part of it on the front into a fish market. We tried to run a little fish market there. When you are dealing just with the local clientele you just don't have enough business, so, he had to go back to doing construction work. Finally, Mrs. Partin wanted to get her grocery business going again. She got that grocery business started and she got Denver to come back and work with her. He went back to work in that store. When I was carrying my second child he was working in that store over there. That's how we got that fish market that you saw in the picture. We had a grocery business and a fish market and we had several other items on the shelf. There wasn't any point in doing a grocery business because Mrs. Partin was still on the corner and she had another person working for her. My husband, I guess he got tired of it for a while.

JN: Where did you get the fish?

BG: Oh, he went up and down the coast getting it from Hutchins or West Palm Beach. They used to sell wholesale. They sell wholesale today. But he would go up there and get fish.

JN: And you were describing to me the condition of Tenth Avenue.

BG: Tenth Avenue couldn't have been over ten or twelve feet wide.

JN: In the forties and fifties?

BG: In the early fifties they began to widen it. But it was just a hard topped road, rock put down and some tar put over it. And you couldn't drive on it before it dried because you would peel up that tar and that tar had to stay there before you could drive on it. And they would come back and put some sand over it. They put down some rock and they put down some asphalt, it was tar, then they put some sand over it and let it get dry. They had to let it stay there so long before you could walk on it. They didn't have the paving like they have today. Now that road was paved a long time, then, in the early fifties they really began to put, oh by the way, they changed Wells Road and Boynton began numbering streets. Ocean Avenue became the dividing line.

JN: What year was that?

BG: The early fifties, around 1952-1953, it was before 1955 if I remember correctly.

JN: What kinds of food do you remember eating as a child, homemade specialties?

BG: Well, there were no fast foods, period. When I was growing up in our home my mother and father, my mother learned how to provide for a large family and we had a regular breakfast. I remember eating eggs and bacon. We grew chickens when I was a girl, so I remember chickens. I remember having, well, you could buy more groceries than you can think about. When I got married you had, corn flakes or cereal or something. Grits were a good thing, grits and fish. There were a lot of fish in the area. My mother used to go fishing and she kept a lot of fish around. Grits and fish are still good today. Mother made biscuits every morning. Every morning she made a pan of biscuits for the family. Biscuits and sausage were easy to come by.

JN: was that in the twenties and thirties?

BG: I don't remember too much about the twenties. I know about the thirties. I can remember good the thirties. One thing that I don't remember much about is the depression. I do know my mother and father never got on a relief line. We never got anything on relief because my father always worked.

JN: Where did you go to the picture show?

BG: Wow, I didn't go to the picture shows until I was a -- and then I had to go with my big brother. My mother didn't allow me. My parents were very strict and they didn't allow me to go out too much by myself. I couldn't go out unless I was with my brother. In fact, I didn't start dating until I started teaching school. I was nineteen before my daddy would let anyone come in the house and even try and date me. I didn't do too much going out. There was a little theater in Delray, if I remember correctly. They called it the Prince Theater. A man named Prince owned that theater. It didn't cost but fifteen cents, ten and fifteen cents for that theater. But I don't ever remember going to that theater by myself. I had to go with my brothers.

JN: There was the old Delray Theater on Atlantic.

BG: That was after my day. That old Delray Theater was after I grew up. That theater moved from out there on Fifth Avenue to the Delray Theater on Atlantic. That was the late fifties or early sixties. Now the theater I remember, you may not remember anything about it because it may be older than what you are. But there was a theater on Fifth avenue, a man named Prince, a stout man, a bald headed stout man -- big stomach.

JN: Was it a Black theater?

BG: It was a White man that owned the theater. He would bring in pictures every Saturday night. There wasn't but one night. Every Saturday night he would have a movie, a good movie for ten or fifteen cents. There wasn't anything on the movie but cowboys, and that was it. I will never forget though. He

had a movie there called *Blue Hawaii*. I remember that well. *The Night is Young*. I imagine I was getting to be in my teens in that era, in the late forties. Late thirties and early forties.

JN: was the theater segregated inside?

BG: There was nothing but segregation. There was no one in it but Blacks. Everything was segregated. There was White town, and when you came across Swinton you were in White town. That was it. Swinton. Swinton was the dividing line. You came across, I think it was N.W. Fourth Avenue and you were in Black town period. When you went down to Mr. Fountain, a brother of the Fountain's chain down there owned a yard goods store right on the corner of Swinton and Atlantic.

JN: Where that old building is now?

BG: I used to buy cloth out of there for fifteen cents. That store used to be a grocery store down there. Fountains had a grocery store and a yard goods store on the south side and a grocery store on the other side. And the two men, I don't know who owned the grocery store, but I know the Fountains had the yard goods store and he was a brother of the Fountain that owns the chain of stores now. I remember that when I was a girl because that is where I used to buy my clothes, get the cloth to make my dresses. When I was taking home economics I would go down there and get a whole dress for forty-five cents.

Three yards. The post office was on First Street South East, then they moved the post office to North East Third Street. They then moved the post office to this side of Atlantic.

JN: Did your mother do any canning in those days?

BG: Oh yes. At Christmas time my mother would make what she called potato pone. She would grind the potatoes, grate the potatoes on a grater. And then she would make it up. She called it a potato pone. It was most delicious. I said I was going to make me one this year. It is a lot of tedious work because you have to grate it. And you grate it very fine. If you take big potatoes that you can't do anything with...

JN: And it makes a bread.

BG: You don't put any flour in it you just grate the potatoes, season it up and fix it up.

JN: You use the potato meal as the starchy product of the bread?

BG: You put maybe a tablespoon of flour in it to hold it together but there is no flour in it. Like you make carrot cake but you don't put as much flour in it as you do carrot cake.

JN: What kinds of things did you can?

BG: Tomatoes. My mother used to make watermelon rind, she would pickle it down and she made a watermelon rind preserve. She would put that watermelon rind in vinegar and soak it overnight and she would drain it off and she would cook it down and put the pickling spices in it and it was most delicious. In the summer, any fruit -- she used to make mango preserves, she made guava jelly, mulberry -- incidentally we used to make what we called mulberry stew. We would put dumplings in the mulberry. And you could pick huckleberries. You know where Spady Elementary School is now? I used to go pick huckleberries. Do you know what a huckleberry is?

JN: It is like a blueberry.

BG: Right, but it grows on a low bush. And all of that low area north of Spady Elementary is low palmettoes. There were no homes out there, no houses. That school house was the farthest thing north. We would pick huckleberries after school when they would come in the spring and summer. My mother would can them, jar them up. We had to pick them, clean them, and she would steam them down just enough and then she would make huckleberry pie. She would can them in Ball jars and we would have huckleberry pie in the summer.

JN: Mr. Lacey told me that in the twenties and thirties some Seminole Indians would come through and pick the huckleberries for ten cents a quart.

BG: I used to sell huckleberries for fifteen cents a quart. You could buy them, go out there and pick them. Fifteen cents was good money in those days.

JN: Where did you sell them?

BG: We would go to White town and sell them.

JN: Door to door?

BG: Yes. Go to White town and sell them. My brothers would do it. They would go sell them. Mama would let them go but I was very much sheltered. I imagine that's why I have sheltered my children so much. I also found out that the ones that are sheltered end up better. Not overly sheltered, but if you don't get a chance to run out there too much you don't get too loose. That brings to my mind, you asked me earlier what we ate. (We ate) the things we eat now; Potato pie, lemon pie. My mother used to make lemon pie from scratch.

JN: Lemon meringue pie?

BG: Lemon meringue pie. And she would make it from scratch. There were never any boxes, so everything was cooked in the home.

JN: Key lime pie. Did you make key lime pie?

BG: Key lime pie wasn't so popular then. It was probably being made. She would make pecan pie. Another thing she would make at Christmas was hogs head cheese. She would order a hogs head, from where, I don't know. She proceeded to fix that hog head cheese. She would debone it, clean it, scrub it, and I would watch her do it every year. But that's the one thing I never learned to do.

JN: It must be quite an art.

BG: It was an art. Mr. Holliday, Herbert Holliday down in Delray -- every Christmas season my mother would carry him and his wife a small jar. It would be jellied just like hog's head cheese.

JN: Is your mother still alive?

JN: No This is a picture of my mother. She died in 1955, April 2, 1955. But to me she was a fine character woman. She could sing, and that's how I got interested in playing the piano, playing it so she could sing.

JN: And your father?

BG: He died in 1962. My mother was a spiritual woman. Very religious woman. She could sing -- she had a beautiful lyric soprano. All of her daughters sing alto but my mother had a lyric soprano. She sang beautifully. She wanted to sing, she sang the songs of the day, and I took music lessons, and I started playing the piano before I could sing. That's how I got interested in playing. I played for the choir. I play organ at my church.

JN: What was the first hurricane that you remember?

BG: I remember the 1947 hurricane. I was pregnant. I was just married in 1947, in September, and my husband and I were living in this little four-room house.

JN: In Boynton or Delray?

BG: In Boynton, on Eleventh. We bought the same house that we moved on Tenth.

JN: To use as your market?

BG: That's what we enlarged and used as the house that I lived in and as the fish market. I was in that house during that storm and my baby moved, quivered the first time. I remember very well because I was scared to death. The house just raised up and rocked and teetered. And my husband lost his wedding band trying to brace that house because it was so low.



JN: Outside the house?

BG: He was outside that house during that high hurricane and braced that house so that it wouldn't topple over. I remember that one very well. I heard my parents talk about the 1928 storm. The one thing that I can remember about the 1928 storm was that we were in and going next door to a larger house.

JN: Where were you living then?

BG: We were living in Delray. I remember that much. I read the paper to hear what happened in Delray. You remember there was no communication. Newspapers weren't easy to get. There were no radios. I remember my parents getting a radio in the middle thirties.

JN: What were the first radio shows that you remember?

BG: I remember *Guiding Light* on the radio. There was Lou Costello, I remember *Amos and Andy*, *The Lone Ranger*, there was a soap opera called *Kent*, the last name was Kent.

JN: Where did the radio station broadcast come from?

BG: Miami. West Palm Beach didn't have one.

JN: So, your first radios picked up Miami.

BG: We picked up WQAM and WIOD in Miami. The first radio station was WQAM in Miami and WIOD.

JN: And that was in the early thirties?

BG: That was in the middle thirties that I remember.

JN: Did that change your lives quite a bit, having a radio?

BG: Oh, yes. We heard the fights, the Joe Louis fights. And my father, oh boy! That was his thing to listen to the fights every weekend. We had our first telephone in the house in the forties after I finished college. I was married I think when mama and daddy got a phone. You had to call the operator, there was no dialing. You had a number and the operator called you and told you that you had a phone call. That is how early I can remember the phone. For the most part we had a pretty comfortable life. our activities mostly centered around church.

JN: Are there one or two stories that especially stand out in your mind about your teaching career in Boynton or Delray? A particular story, event, or pupil?

BG: Well you see, playing the piano when I was in the elementary school system, I was hired mostly because I would play the piano. You see Palm Beach County didn't pay any music teachers in those days. They had to get someone with many talents. When I put on my application blank that I could play the piano that was a sure fire job because you had to play for the whole school, all the Christmas programs, everything. They got two things for one. You did all the music and all of the teaching of the class and all of the operettas. Every year you had to have an operetta at the end of school and you had to have something for Christmas.

JN: What was an operetta exactly.

BG: It was a play. The kids had to get on stage and the kids imitated fairies. That was called an operetta. I have one or two copies in my house.

JN: Well, Mrs. Girtman, we have about used up the tape. We have been talking for an hour and a half. I want to thank you very much for the interview. Many people in the future will, I hope, will be able to avail themselves of this interview. When it is transcribed, a collection of these will present a picture of the community that was previously unknown to present residents and residents to come. Every new person interviewed is a discovery because I have not just learned one thing but an hour and a half's worth of information that I didn't know before. It is like unlocking a door to a room, a private room, and making this information public. It is extremely beneficial to the community at large.

BG: Well really. I thank you very much. I have enjoyed doing it. It brought back a lot of memories. Once it is transcribed you can certainly have a copy.

BG: I appreciate that very much.